

ARABIAN SEA DYNAMICS

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Program #: ONR-322 PO N00014-94-1-0747

LONG-TERM GOAL

The goal is to identify and understand the mechanisms which determine features of stratification and motion in the upper 200 m or so of mid-latitude oceans. This is the depth range over which surface fluxes of momentum and buoyancy have direct influence. Our interest is in the processes by which shear and stratification interact to change upper ocean structure.

OBJECTIVES

Our objective is to use moored array records we have produced in various observational programs in both the upper ocean and near-topography environments to produce statistical descriptions of flow that can be compared with models.

APPROACH

Our approach is to make moored observations at a variety of locations in order to be able to describe coherent patterns of variability based on a number of realizations of oceanic processes. In our upper ocean work, we have been using C. S. Draper Laboratory Profiling Current Meters (PCMs) to gather moored array time series of current, temperature, and salinity profiles from about 200 to 20 m depth. Our most recent observations come from a sequence of two 6-month PCM deployments in the Arabian Sea as part of a 5-mooring year-long upper ocean array to study upper ocean response to monsoon forcing.

WORK COMPLETED

We have completed field work in the Arabian Sea. One of the two PCMs deployed as part of a five-mooring array (in collaboration with investigators at WHOI and SIO) was lost during the height of the southwest monsoon due to failure of a mooring component. Fortunately, the sequence of two six month deployments at the remaining site was successful in returning a year of temperature, salinity, and current records from 35m to 200m depth. These data have been edited and are currently being analyzed.

Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 30 SEP 1997		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1997 to 00-00-1997	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Arabian Sea Dynamics				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) University of Washington,School of Oceanography,Seattle,WA,98195				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 5	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

RESULTS

Moored profiler observations of the upper 200 m of the Arabian Sea describe the evolution of temperature, salinity, and current over the course of the year starting October, 1994. The observations were collected as part of a moored array located roughly 500 km SE of the Arabian Peninsula. Changes in upper ocean structure can be associated with four distinct seasons (the two monsoons and the two intermonsoonal periods). These changes are evident in low-pass filtered plots of temperature and salinity (Figure 1) and low passed and near inertial shear (Figure 2). The autumnal intermonsoonal period was characterized by strong currents and strong advective changes in upper ocean temperature and salinity structure. Currents of 1.3 m/s and pycnocline depth variations of 50 m were recorded during the passage of a mesoscale disturbance shortly after the mooring was deployed. Currents subsided and the permanent pycnocline deepened at the beginning of the winter (northeast) monsoon season. A surface mixed layer formed and deepened to about 110 m depth during this period, despite winds weaker than 10 m/s over the entire season. Near-inertial shear at the base of this layer remained relatively weak. The surface mixed layer formed during the winter monsoon gradually became stratified by both temperature and salinity during the vernal intermonsoonal season. Changes in salinity at depths shallower than the permanent pycnocline roughly balanced the local net evaporative from the surface. With the onset of the summer (southwest) monsoon, a surface mixed layer eroded the shallow pycnocline developed in the preceding season. This layer deepened to about 80 m depth, accompanied by vigorous near-inertial shear at its base, as wind speeds remained at 10-15 m/s. The permanent pycnocline rose as winds began to subside, accompanied by strong currents, completing the annual cycle.

The observed annual cycle suggests that the processes of advection, convection, surface heating, and mechanical mixing each dominate upper ocean structure over the sequence of the four seasons, respectively.

IMPACT/IMPLICATIONS

Although analysis of our Arabian Sea data is at an early stage, it is clear that the phenomenon of "Arabian Sea cooling" (that is, surface temperature drop during the summer monsoon) is accomplished locally by mechanical mixing early in the season, but much more powerfully by advective events that persist into the fall intermonsoonal period. Surprisingly, convective cooling accounts for a much deeper surface mixed layer during the much milder winter monsoon than does mechanical mixing during the high winds of the summer monsoon. Latent heat release and its attendant fresh water flux appears to be the primary component of vertical buoyancy flux in the region. The spring restratification of the deep surface mixed layer formed in winter suggests that vertical diffusion is effective in altering upper ocean structure beneath the seasonal pycnocline and erasing spiciness. The results of this study have general applicability to the evolution of upper ocean structure throughout the world ocean.

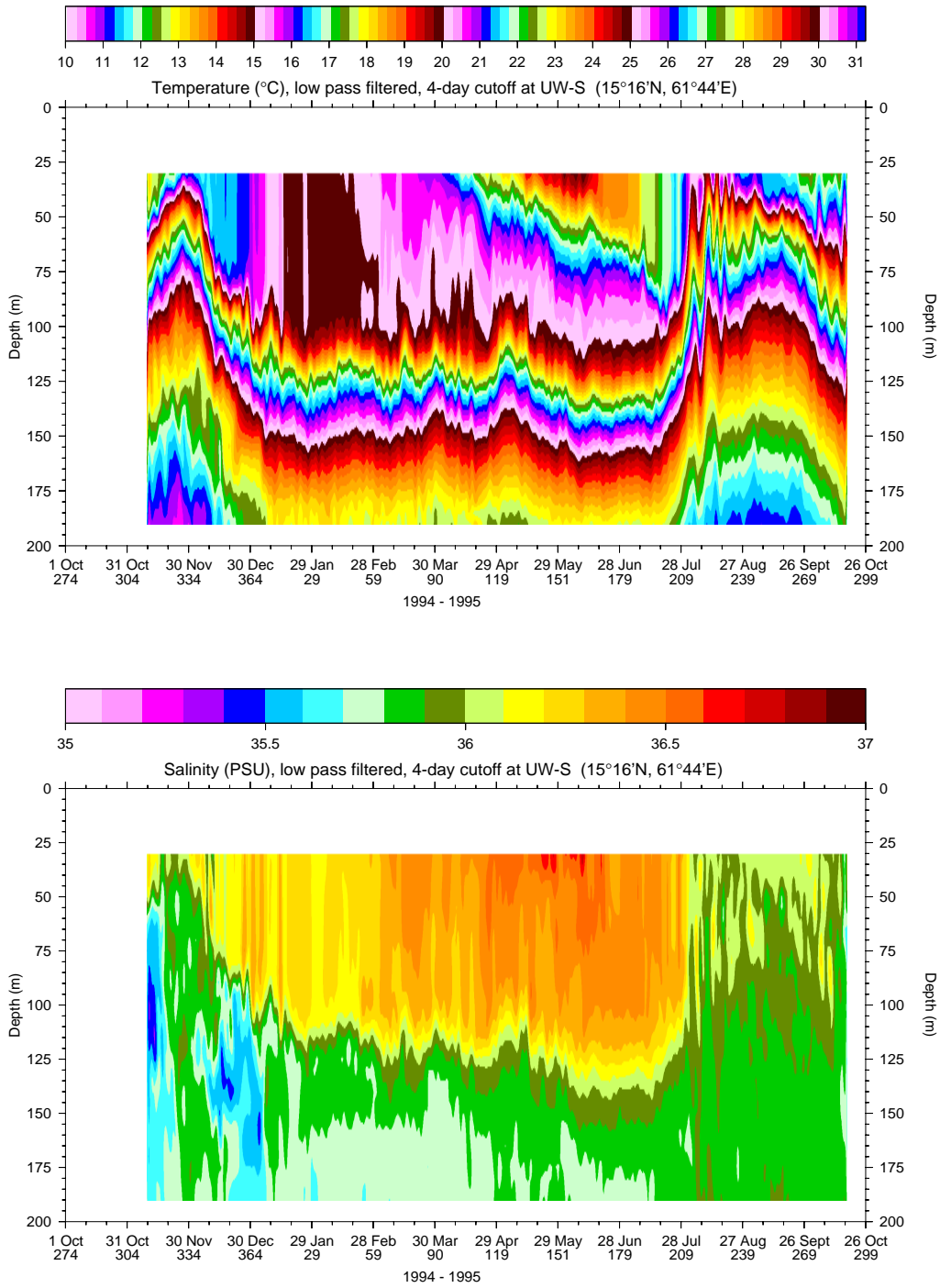


Figure 1. Four-day low pass filtered temperature (upper) and salinity (lower) from site UW-S in the Arabian Sea. The contour intervals for temperature (0.25°C) and salinity (0.1PSU) are approximately equal in their contribution to density ($\sim 0.075 \text{ kg/m}^3$). The temperature color scale repeats every 5°C

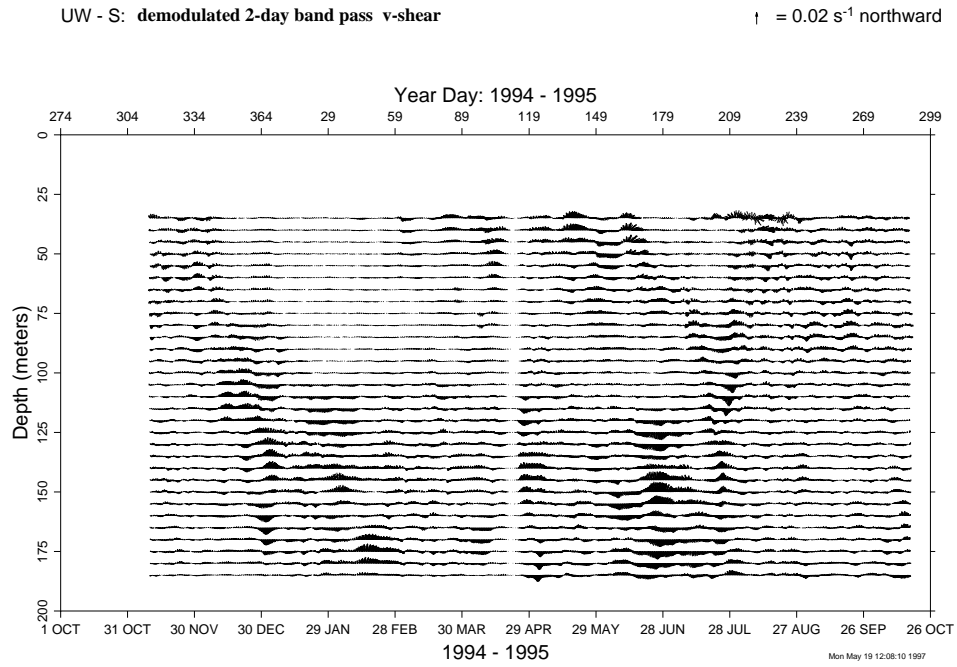
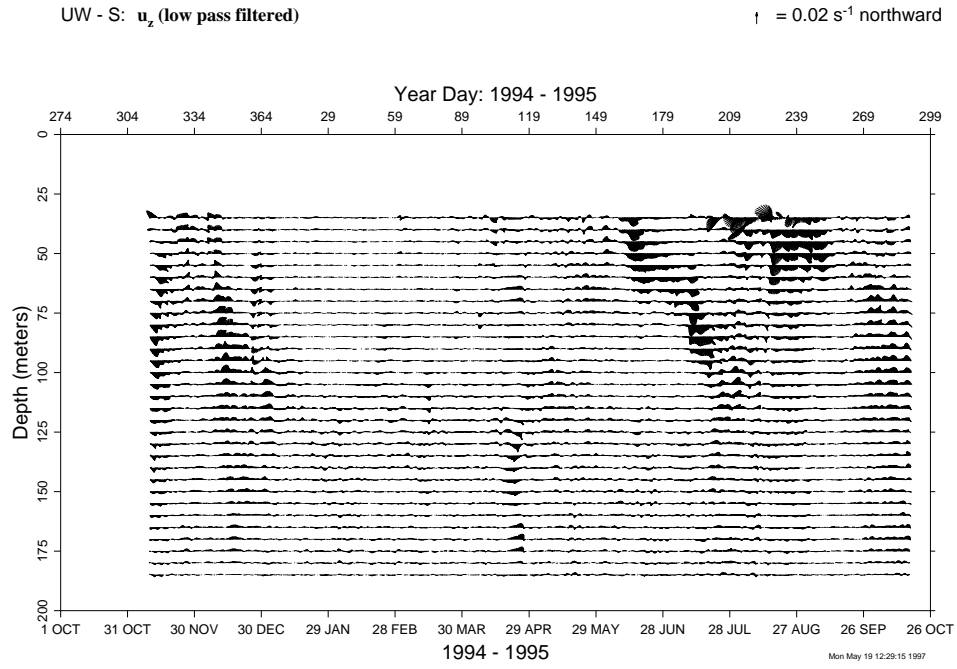


Figure 2. Stick vector plots of four-day low pass filtered shear (upper) and four-to-one day band passed complex demodulated shear (lower) from site UW-S in the Arabian Sea. Shear is estimated as a vertical centered first difference over 10m. The scale of the sticks is the same in both frames (0.02 s^{-1}) and corresponds to the 5 m vertical separation between PCM bins. The absolute orientation of complex demodulated shear vectors is arbitrary, but the relative orientation is not and indicates phase variation.

RELATED PROJECTS

This project is a collaborative effort with Dr. R. Weller of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and Dr. D. Rudnick of Scripps Institution of Oceanography to understand upper ocean dynamics and thermodynamics in the Arabian Sea. Our measurements are being made available to other ONR Arabian Sea investigators involved in physical and biooptical studies. Our studies are relevant to the chemical and biological studies carried out in the same region by JGOFS investigators.

REFERENCES

Rudnick, D. L., R. A. Weller, C. C. Eriksen, T. J. Dickey, J. Marra, and C. Langdon, Moored Instruments weather Arabian Sea monsoons, yield data. *Eos, Trans. Am. Geophys. Union*, 78, 117 & 120-121, 1997.